

# BAJI RAO I AND NORTH INDIA

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It has been generally held by writers on Maratha history that Baji Rao I not only initiated in a systematic manner the Maratha policy of expansion towards North India, but that he had formed the fixed design of overthrowing the Mughal empire and planting the Maratha banner on the walls of Attock. This contention is supported by certain passages in the Chitnis Bakkhar describing the controversy between Baji Rao and the Pratinidhi, Shripat Rao, over Maratha policy in relation to the Deccan and North India. We are told that whereas Pratinidhi wanted that attention should first be given to the over-running of the Konkan where the Sidi of Janjira had recovered many areas, and the completion of the conquest of the Karnatak begun by Shivaji, Baji Rao dwelt on the weakness and imbecility of the Mughal Court which was torn by factions and internecine feuds. He dismissed the Pratinidhi's fear of the Nizam and of a renewed Mughal invasion, offering to hold the Nizam in check as well as to effect a northward drive. He is supposed to have ended his peroration with the famous words, "Strike, strike at the root and the branches will fall of themselves." Listen but to my counsel and I shall plant the Maratha banner on the walls of Attock.<sup>1</sup>

However, a too literal interpretation of Chitnis has tended to give a distorted picture of Baji Rao's policy. While Baji Rao certainly made the conquest of Malwa and Gujarat his immediate objective, it is by no means certain that he aimed at the conquest of the whole of the Mughal empire in the North, or that he was disinterested in the conquest and domination of the Deccan.

The essential argument of the Partinidhi that an all-out programme of expansion towards the north without befriending or effectively subduing the Nizam and establishing a Maratha supremacy over the Deccan and the Karnatak would be dangerous and against the best interests of the Marathas had a good deal of force. Baji Rao pointed to Malwa and Gujarat in preference to the Deccan because the Deccan

1. Chitnis, *Thoris Shahu Maharaj yanchen Charitra*, pp. 60-61.

had been impoverished by famine and war, and money—an ever present requirement of the Maratha sardars—was not to be had there. But even while struggling for the establishment of the Maratha domination over Malwa and Gujarat, Baji Rao seems to have constantly kept before him the broader political objective of establishing a Maratha hegemony over the Deccan. In fact, it would seem that for Baji Rao the Maratha domination of Malwa and Gujarat was a prelude to the complete Maratha domination of the Deccan.

The nature of Baji Rao's ambitions in the Deccan is indicated by an extant paper containing important demands regarding the Deccan. For the sake of clarity, the document entitled "Memorandum of Demands" might be translated in full.<sup>2</sup>

1. The grants of *swarajya*, *chauthai* and *sardeshmukhi* already granted under the imperial seal should be ratified by royal *farman*, and the *peshkash*<sup>3</sup> excused.

2. The *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* of Malwa and Gujarat should be granted by royal *farman*.

3. The kingdom of Tanjore which is an old Maratha kingdom and has been annexed by the Mughals should be restored.

4. The forts of Shivner, Chakan, Maholi, Karnala, Pali, Miraj and Kirkol under Mughal occupation and the territories dependent on these forts, i.e. the *tarf* of Junner, Parner, Rajangaon, Akhuj, the 'suba' of Miraj, Kotul and Dhadharpal should be restored.

5. The *deshmukhi* of Shivner should be granted to us (Shahu).

6. The appointment to the *subahdari* of the Deccan should be made on our recommendation.

7. *Farmans* should be sent to the Deccani Pathans, Diler Khan, Abdun Nabi Khan and Alaf Khan, that in order to help the royal business they should join the Maratha armies of Raja Shahu and chastise Nizam-ul-Mulk.

8. The *subahdars* of the Deccan should not treat with the Raja of Panhala.

2. Selection from the Peshwa Daftar, vol. X, No. 1. Cf. Sardesai, *New History*, vol. II, pp. 78-79. Some of the clauses have been omitted or incorrectly rendered by the author.

3. In return for the grant of the *swarajya*, Shahu had agreed in 1719 to pay a *peshkash* of Rupees ten lakhs, and in return for *sardeshmukhi* Rs. 1,17,19,800/- 12/- (Dr. A. G. Powar, *JHRC*, Proc. 1940, pp. 204-12). However, not even ten lakhs out of this sum had been paid till 1724.

9. Abdul Majid Khan, the young son of Dilaer Khan should be granted the title of Diler Khan and confirmed in his *jagir*, and Abdul Karim Khan, the cousin of Abdul Majid Khan, should be confirmed as the subahdar of Bijapur.

10. Deserters from our side should not be employed in Mughal service.

11. Ramji Goswami etc. petitioners<sup>4</sup> should be granted a *farman* conferring (lands in) *inam*.<sup>5</sup>

12. Maratha nobles from our side who have been given service by the Mughals should be sent back to us.

13. The Mughal and Maratha army appointed to the Deccan should be sent a *farman* that whoever exerted himself in chastising Nizam-ul-Mulk would be honoured and confirmed in his *mansab* and *jagir*.

14. *Fateh Singh Bhonsle should be granted the subahdari of Hyderabad, with the mansab of 9,000 and a jagir for (the upkeep of) 20,000 troops.*

15. The forts and territories captured by the Habshis (Sidi of Janjira) should be restored to us, and if necessary, the royal armies should chastise him and help the Marathas in occupying them.

16. *Rupees fifty lakhs promised by the Emperor should be granted.*<sup>6</sup>

In substances the Marathas demanded the *chauth* and *sardesh-mukhi* of Malwa and Gujarat and the complete Maratha domination of the Deccan, along with a subvention of Rupees fifty lakhs, and the withdrawal of help and recognition from Shambhaji of Kolhapur.<sup>7</sup>

What was the occasion for these staggering demands by the Marathas? It has been argued that the occasion was Nizam-ul-Mulk's rebellion in 1724, and the Emperor's attempt to secure Maratha support for Mubariz Khan. However, it appears strange that the name of Mubariz Khan should not appear anywhere in such an important document. Clause 9 suggests that the document was written after the death of Diler Khan who fought against Nizam-ul-Mulk at the battle of Shakar

4. The Marathi word is *गुर्ग* which is obviously the Persian word *دعاگو*.

5. *Inam* or gift was generally a hereditary grant of land, without any condition of military service.

6. Cf. Sardesai, *loc. cit.*, where the sum of Rs. 50,000/- only is mentioned.

7. Shambhaji's predecessor, Shivaji II, the son of Tara Bai was granted the *mansab* of 3000/2000 and the title of Anup Singh along with the *deshmukhi* of Hyderabad by Jahandar Shah at the instance of his wazir, Zulfiqar Khan (*Akhbarat*, entry, d. Sept. 4, 1712). It is not certain if a similar recognition was ever extended to Shambhaji.

Khera, while clause 15 suggests that it was written at a time when the Marathas were contemplating action against the Sidi of Janjira (i.e. 1731-32). Since relations between the Delhi Court and Nizam-ul-Mulk, and Nizam-ul-Mulk and the Afghans of the Karnatak were never good, the document could have been written any time between 1724 and 1733.

The nature of Baji Rao's ambitions regarding the Deccan is attested to by a number of other documents. Thus, the first paper, relating to the demands made by Baji Rao and agreed to by Nizam-ul-Mulk at Mungi Shivgaon on March 6, 1728 reads as follows :—

"The administration of the Deccan should be handed over to us : by God's grace, the task shall be carried out with loyalty and economy—provided that loyalty (to the Emperor) shall be observed through you."<sup>8</sup>

The Marathas could scarcely have hoped that such a demand would be agreed to by Nizam-ul-Mulk in practice without a prolonged war. However, that it should have been made by the Marathas is significant.

Between 1728 and 1735 there was extended conflict between the Marathas and the Mughals in Malwa and Gujarat. The Bundelas entered into an offensive and defensive alliance with the Marathas, and invited them to lead an offensive towards Allahabad and the areas to the east of it. The danger of Maratha incursion into the Duab alarmed Saadat Khan of Awadh who looked upon these areas as lying in his natural line of expansion. He repaired to Delhi, apparently convinced that the Maratha expansion towards the North was all the Nizam's game. The Maratha agent in Bundelkhand, Mudhaji Hari, informed Baji Rao that Saadat Khan had formed the project of meeting Baji Rao personally in Malwa. The terms he intended to offer were that the *subahdar* of the Deccan should be a person nominated by the Peshwa, and that Baji Rao should be appointed the *subahdar* of Malwa and his other demands accepted, stipulating in return that Nizam-ul-Mulk should be properly dealt with.<sup>9</sup> However, it seems that the projected meeting never materialised.

After three years of war from 1732-35, in February, 1736, Baji Rao entered Malwa at the invitation of Khai-i-Dauran, the chief Bakhshi, in order to negotiate a peace settlement with the Emperor. The demands presented to the Emperor by Baji Rao through his wakil, Dhondo Mahadev, included not only a claim for the *subahdari* of Malwa and

8. *SPD*, vol. XV, p. 89. The Marathi text seems to be a literal interpretation of a Persian text. Baji Rao's intention apparently was that the Nizam, as the representative of the Mughal Emperor, should delegate his powers to the Marathas who promised to remain loyal to the Emperor.

9. *SPD*, vol. XIV, No. 9.



Gujarat with an authority to levy tribute on all the Rajas between the Narmada and the Chambal, and control all the forts etc., but also a stipulation that the *sardeshpandegiri* of the Deccan was to be granted to the Peshwa. The *sardeshpandegiri* was to carry with it 5% of the revenues of the Deccan. There were other demands also. The Emperor agreed to all the demands. It was agreed that the *sanad* for the post of *sardeshpande* would be issued when the question of the *nazar* had been settled. After negotiations, the *nazar* was fixed at 6 lakhs, of which one-fourth was to be paid in cash, and the rest in instalments.<sup>10</sup>

Not satisfied with this, Baji Rao demanded further that the Viceroyalty of the Deccan should be given to an Imperial prince, with the apparent idea that his deputy would be nominated by the Peshwa. The Peshwa also demanded a *jagir* of 50 lakhs for himself in the Deccan, and further stipulated that any additional revenue gained in the Deccan as a result of his efforts would be shared half and half. The demands for the forts of Shivner and the kingdom of Tanjore were repeated, in addition to a number of villages being claimed in *mokasa*.<sup>11</sup>

These extravagant demands threw the Emperor's advisers into consternation. They were prepared to make the Peshwa the *sardeshpande* of the Deccan in order to throw a bone of contention between him and the Nizam and divert the attention of the Peshwa from North India. But they were not willing to hand over the entire Deccan to the Peshwa. Thus, Baji Rao's demands relating to the Deccan were one of the main causes of the break-down of the negotiations with the Emperor in 1786.

Baji Rao now decided to force the Emperor's hands by raiding the Duab. His object according to his own letter, was to induce the Emperor to make peace by showing him the Marathas at the gates of Delhi.<sup>12</sup> However, the raid had the opposite effect from the one intended, and threw the Emperor into the arms of Nizam-ul-Mulk.

The tussle between Nizam-ul-Mulk and Baji Rao which now began was the most momentous struggle faced by Baji Rao. The victor of the struggle would be the virtual arbiter of India. However, for Baji Rao it was more a battle for the supremacy of the Deccan than of North India. "Let every Maratha join," he wrote to his brother, Chimnaji, on the eve of the battle of Bhopal in 1788, "and one grand united push may make us the masters of the Deccan." He also wrote repeatedly, "If the Nawab (Nizam-ul-Mulk) is taken care of, the entire Deccan will be freed of danger."<sup>13</sup>

10. *SPD*, vol. XV, pp. 92-93.

11. *SPD*, vol. XV, p. 95.

12. *Brakmendra Swamichen Chātrita*, p. 27.

13. *Brakmendra Swami*, pp. 88-89; *Sardesai*, *Rajawade*, 871-72.

Although Nizam-ul-Mulk was hard-pressed at Bhopal, Baji Rao refrained from forcing a final show down with him. The final terms referred only to Malwa, and the territory between the Narmada and the Chambal. However, it seems that Baji Rao agreed to these terms only after he had pressed once again the Maratha claims relating to the Deccan. Baji Rao presented the following demands :—

1. Cede the kingdom of Tajore which had belonged to Shivaji.
2. The Peshwa is deeply in debt. To help him a *jagir* worth 50 lakhs should be granted to him in the subah of Khandesh, Aurangabad and Bijapur.
3. The charge for the *watani sardeshpandegiri* of the Deccan should be fixed at 5%, and the administration of the Deccan should be carried on through the Peshwa.
4. Cede the fort of Shivner, and a number of villages in *mokasa*.<sup>14</sup>

It is difficult to foresee how Baji Rao's policy would have shaped after the battle of Bhopal had Nadir Shah's invasion not intervened, followed by Baji Rao's premature death. Baji Rao may have pushed forward into North India beyond Malwa. It is equally possible that he may have concentrated on fulfilling his unrealised ambitions relating to the Deccan. In that case, many of the political blunders of Balaji Baji Rao might have been avoided, and the Marathas placed in a better position to establish a lasting domination over North India.

In view of the close and continuous interest of Baji Rao in the Deccan, it seems scarcely correct to accept the notion that Baji Rao's primary objective was the establishment of a Maratha domination in the North and that he was unmindful of the importance of consolidating further the Maratha position in the Deccan. Baji Rao was apparently not satisfied with the Maratha position in the Deccan as established by the treaty of Mungi Shivgaon in 1728, and strove constantly to bring the entire Deccan under the administrative control of the Marathas. The North Indian policy of Baji Rao, therefore, needs to be re-assessed and viewed against the background of his ambitions in the Deccan,

14. *SPB*, vol. XV, pp. 94-95. These demands are contained in a separate *padli* entitled : "Demands of Baji Rao Pant Pradhan presented to Nizam-ul-Mulk in writing."